Phalen Greenway

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) supported the work of the author of this report but has not reviewed it for publication. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and is not necessarily endorsed by NPCR.

NPCR is coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. NPCR is supported by grants from the US Department of Education Urban Community Service Program, The McKnight Foundation and The Minneapolis Foundation. St. Paul projects are funded in part by the St. Paul Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), The St. Paul Foundation, and St. Paul Companies.

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Minneapolis, MN

Sept., 1999
Document COPC009

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Background, Area History and Trends

This socioeconomic impact study is focused on the potential uses for three large vacant green spaces located in the East Side of St. Paul, between Case Avenue and 3rd Street. Situated within or directly adjacent to three East Side districts, the areas are bordered on the north by an elevated rail line, the south by Interstate 94, the west by Johnson Parkway, and the east by White Bear Avenue. These four major transportation corridors essentially serve as dividers and isolate a primarily residential neighborhood from the green spaces of the neighboring Lake Phalen, Swede Hollow, Battle Creek and Pigs Eye Lake Park areas. Enhancement of the underused vacant green spaces would provide an opportunity to create natural amenities in this East Side neighborhood.

The green spaces currently function as a combination of storm basins, a concrete/construction debris landfill, and sewer easements linearly stretching through the center of the residential area. They are primarily low-lying areas, often significantly below the grade of the surrounding houses and cut off from each other by city streets. The spaces do not have a widely recognized name and are generally vacant and unattended areas. Bordering them is a combination of primarily high-density rental units, single-family homes and two schools, Harding High School and Parkway Elementary School.

Significant elements of the area's original natural setting still exist. The green spaces are part of the Phalen Chain of Lakes, the natural drainage landscape that long ago was the riverbed of the St. Croix River. Currently, their principal function is as ponds and wetlands that detain and filter stormwater runoff, and as wildlife habitat and a migration route between Lake Phalen and the Mississippi River.

Back in the 1960's, the State had plans for an extension of Highway 61 to be sited in this drainage route, running through these existing vacant spaces. However, the extension was never

constructed and much of the land remains designated as public right-of-way property. Since that decision, it appears that no significant plans for development or creation of neighborhood amenities have been seriously considered.

The green spaces contain enormous potential for alternative uses that benefit the neighborhood socially and economically. By protecting the natural resources and revealing the distinct ecological characteristics of the green spaces, recreational and educational areas can be established in the center of a residential neighborhood. Furthermore, enhancing and highlighting the connection of the neighborhood to the existing natural landscape will enhance residents' pride and the public image of the green spaces as a signature amenity.

Creating a name for the greenway will help create a positive perception and an increased identity within the neighborhood. The center of the community could be developed into wetland recreation and education areas, rather than empty, overgrown areas used for illegal dumping and other crime activity. This could not only increase property values, but also residents' pride and connection with the neighborhood.

Developing these green spaces will reconnect the area with Lake Phalen, Ames Lake and Pigs Eye Lake. Although significant impediments exist for physically connecting the areas, revitalizing this corridor will perceptually link it to the green infrastructure that makes up the whole East Side of St. Paul. This connection will augment the current work that is going on in the other East Side neighborhoods and create a network of greenways for the whole area.

Various neighborhoods and organizations are making extensive efforts to expand the greenways network on the East Side. The Pigs Eye Greenway Collaborative plans to develop a greenway north and east of the Mississippi from Fish Creek to Swede Hollow with the help of the Greening of the Great River organization and the Department of Natural Resources. With its

Lower Phalen Creek Restoration Project, Friends of Swede Hollow have plans to connect Swede Hollow Park to the Mississippi River by resurfacing Phalen Creek. Ames Lake is a unique national model of the potential for reclaiming a natural wetland and a major component of the Phalen Village neighborhood plan to restore natural amenities as a means of improving residents' quality of life. The Phalen Creek Trail continues to be expanded, ultimately providing a bike path from St. Paul to Duluth. Lake Phalen and Battle Creek Park have also received recent enhancements.

Revitalizing these three green spaces would reconnect the neighborhood with the East Side, anchor the community around an amenity, provide recreational and educational resources, increase the nearby property values, and enhance the positive perception of the area. For these reasons, we think it is important to explore the possibility of redeveloping these areas and hope that our study can contribute to that effort.

Current Environment

Running through this corridor of empty green space areas is the beltline storm sewer pipe. The pipe has outlived its predicted 50-year life, and is in need of considerable repairs. Several alternatives have been presented and analyzed by Barr Engineering for feasibility and construction costs. Any improvements to these green space areas must consider the sewer pipe and address the need of increased storm water capacity for the area.

Due to this sewer pipe and the underlying geology of the area, the green spaces are not suitable for either housing or commercial developments. Currently, there is minimal awareness of the geology of the vacant spaces, offering the potential for a unique natural resource and an immense educational opportunity for the wider community. The three open

spaces are remnants of the pre-glacial river valley of the St. Croix River. The low elevation, underlying aquifer, and gravel base of the three green spaces create wetlands and unstable soil that is unsuitable for development. They are perfect areas for many other uses though, including wetlands habitat, stormwater drainage and recreation areas. These spaces have remained vacant due to these geologic factors and, according to Karen Swenson of the North East Neighborhood Development Corporation, residents do not see these vast tracts of land as barriers within the neighborhood; the areas are essentially overlooked. Should they remain spaces that are overlooked? Or would the community be better served by turning these spaces into something beneficial for the community? Ultimately the community is in the best position to determine how to best integrate these underused spaces into their neighborhood.

Crime and Safety

The neighborhood areas adjacent to the vacant green spaces have a relatively low incidence of criminal activity when compared to the entire East Side. The greatest concentration of crime on St. Paul's East Side is located south of Maryland and east of Edgerton along Arcade Street and Payne Avenue. Unlike this section of the East Side, the study neighborhood has relatively low crime rates for both crime types: personal and property. Car thefts increased from 1997 to 1998, but the overall percentage of motor vehicle theft is among the lowest on the East Side.

Although crime statistics may be relatively low for the area, revitalizing the natural corridor will serve to maintain crime rates and possibly further reduce crime. Through design strategies that facilitate "eyes on the park," the areas will be opened up to the neighborhood and will allow for greater natural surveillance. Creating this defensible space will reduce the perception of danger in the vacant spaces and diminish opportunities for crime. Furthermore, the

improved appearance and increased sense of identity will give community members pride and a reason to use, improve and defend the recreational area, resulting in a safer area.

Social Benefits: Convenient Access to Natural and Recreational Areas

Greenways serve an important role in society by being places for recreation, natural open space and wildlife habitat. As urban areas continue to grow, greenways can help add to the livability of neighborhoods by providing convenient access to the natural environment.

Access to recreational opportunities plays an important part in our lives. According to Blatt and Crandall (1988), "linear recreation (jogging, bicycling, rollerblading, etc.) is increasing dramatically" (p.269). You can see this phenomena first hand by visiting any of the lakes or riding any of the bike trails in the Twin Cities area. As these recreational activities continue to grow, new greenways and trails need to be established in order to avoid continued congestion along current paths. With the possible addition of separated bike/rollerblading and pedestrian paths, the proposed greenway could become an added asset to the Eastside neighborhoods. The greenway could connect to existing and/or planned trails including: the Lake Phalen trails, the Phalen Creek Trail, the Gateway State Trail, and the Mississippi River National Recreational Area trails. This would allow the Eastside neighborhoods easy access to the Mississippi River, Downtown St. Paul, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Stillwater, and other areas connected by the regional trail network.

Convenient access to open space is also a popular amenity among urban residents. People often cite convenient access to jobs, good schools, cultural attractions, recreational areas and other urban amenities as primary reasons for living in the city. Preserving available open space in the city provides access to the neighborhood's natural environment in an otherwise

densely built-up urban area. Open space creates areas that people can enjoy and wildlife can flourish in. Open space also allows environmentally sensitive areas to be protected from future development (Tourbier, 1994). Tourbier (1994) adds that these areas can also serve as important areas for better storm water management in urban areas (p.14). As urban areas expand, stormwater management is becoming an increasingly critical environmental concern. The proposed Phalen Greenway would follow an area that is already designated by the Minnesota DNR as being an important wildlife migration corridor. Adding the greenway would help the Eastside neighborhoods to capitalize on an otherwise underutilized natural resource.

Economic Impacts of Greenways and Wetlands

Urban greenways can provide a variety of amenities for the neighborhood and the city, including scenic views, open space preservation and access to recreational opportunities, and often result in economic benefits to the surrounding properties and the city. Primarily, the economic values experienced are increased nearby property values, improved marketability of nearby properties and the neighborhood, economic development in the form of increased or additional neighborhood businesses, increased developer interest in new and redeveloped real estate projects near open space, and increased property tax revenue for the city. "Potential economic impacts will largely depend upon the amenities offered, the scale and magnitude of your project, accessibility, level of projected use, and intended users."[i]

Statistical studies and surveys of property owners and real estate experts have shown that greenways have a positive impact on nearby property values. These analyses attempt to isolate the effect of greenways from the other variables that can cause variation in property values, such as construction quality, age and size. The focus of greenway studies is typically on the relationship between property values and the proximity to a greenway. Essentially, the studies

estimate the increase in property value as the distance between property and the greenway decreases. In general, the studies provide evidence proximity to a greenway results in nearby property value increases, although properties directly adjacent to a greenway may see less or no property value increase.

The effect of greenways on property values is also dependent upon the type of greenway or wetland that is created in the neighborhood. "Property value increases are likely to be highest near those greenways which:

- highlight open space rather than highly developed facilities
- have limited vehicular access, but some recreational access
- Have effective maintenance and security."[ii]

In general, the best greenway design focuses on neighborhood compatibility by minimizing potential conflicts between nearby property owners, especially homeowners, and greenway users.

In the case of wetlands, a 1993 University of Minnesota study explored the possibility of varying valuations on different types of wetlands. Four types of wetlands were identified: forested, emergent vegetation, scrub shrub and open water. The researchers used regression analysis methodology to represent people's willingness-to-pay to live nearer or farther away from the various types of wetlands. People's willingness-to-pay to live nearer to a wetland was statistically significant but not very large in any real property market sense. However, results of the study found that people clearly prefer the more open and aesthetic wetland types, specifically open water and scrub shrub, rather than the emergent vegetation or forested wetland types, which are more hidden. The study's primary conclusion is that "the higher ranking wetland types ought

to be favored in public wetland investment and protection decisions, all else equal, at the expense of the other two types."[iii]

Proximity to greenways, parks and trails are commonly used as a marketing tool for selling homes and properties. Real estate listings make use of the proximity of open space amenities in attracting buyers to a property and neighborhood.

Greenways can also help a community attract new, expanding or relocating businesses to their area resulting in increased job opportunities and tax revenues. Greenways are very important as a quality of life factor that corporations consider when they determine where to locate their businesses. "A city's quality of life is more important than purely business-related factors when it comes to attracting new businesses, particularly in the rapidly growing high-tech and service industries."[iv] The natural, open space and recreational access features of greenways are very attractive for companies and their employees.

The benefits / effects of greenspace, open space, or parks can be measured with many means. Economically, you can measure changes in property values, generation of pedestrian traffic and business development. These are all tangible, overarching means of establishing value. When approaching social benefits, you run into the difficulty of indirect benefits, subjectivity of the meaning of value, and inconsequential effects. The social benefits / effects need to be measured on a more individual, community-based consensus. For something to benefit a community socially it needs to address the desires of the community, fulfill its needs, or promote and foster what the community wants to portray. There are many ways to look at the issue, but the community itself will always be central.

Of importance to a community are its schools, and greenspaces can potentially play a large role in enhancing the educational processes. The relatively new environmental science

requirement in Minnesota High Schools necessitates field research which, at present time, will have to be specially arranged for Harding High School students. Mr. Greenbeck, the environmental science teacher at Harding, informed us that students would currently have the opportunity for field study only once a week. These trips would involve bus transportation, which would cost the school money that could be used elsewhere, and could only provide students with a limited experience due to the length of a regular class period. These huge, natural resources in the community could be tapped for direct, daily access to field studies. This would benefit the students by providing longer experiences and the school by negating the cost of the bus. This also benefits the natural environment because these spaces are natural basins for water. As noted earlier, Barr Engineering reported that the local stormwater pipe is over capacity.(add reference) These spaces could fulfill that capacity need, thereby becoming wetlands that could be used for field study.

As was shown in Indianapolis, Indiana, greenspaces can also have the effect of providing students with important skills. In Indianapolis, youth were recruited to help renovate a section of George Washington Park. Besides learning work-related skills, they also learned the importance of citizenship and work ethic. As a result of giving students the opportunity to do this, several who might not have thought of their futures past high school, went on to college. "The students gained valuable training and a summer job, while the rest of the community gained a new facility that meets real environmental education needs" (U.S. Dept. of Interior 1992).

With 50% of Harding students coming from outside the district, it may be hard for students to feel involved in the community if they do not even live there. This obstacle can possibly be hurdled with a simple answer. If these open spaces are to become an amenity for the community, they will need names. One way to get students involved is to have a naming contest

within the school(s), as mentioned on page 1. This could involve Parkway Elementary as well as Harding High, with the winner receiving some prize and the honor of "Cutting the Ribbon" at the opening ceremony. It is things like these that will engage the students of the school with the surrounding community. With stronger ties to the residents of the community and the land itself; the students' educational experience could be greatly enhanced.

Another aspect to note is the change in demographics at Harding High. Currently, 50% are Caucasian, 35% are Asian, 10% are African of African-American, and 1% are Native American.**(SITE ST. PAUL SCHOOLD WEB PAGE)** Up until recently, this community was a predominantly Caucasian, working class neighborhood. Along with the changes in demographics are changes in cultural needs. Extreme interest by Hmong students in a gardening class offered this summer at Harding High shows that there is a lack of at least one thing in the area: gardens, or private places for gardens. One remedy for this is a public garden, which could be part of these open spaces in the community. Community gardens are being planted in cities all over the country; in Portland, New Orleans, and Minneapolis, to name a few.**(DO YOU KNOW A REFERENCE FOR THIS?)** Some form cooperatives while others remain simple gardens where residents share space. The point is to provide a space to grow food, while at the same time providing a space for residents to interact.

Values Many studies which have illustrated the marked increase of property values near open spaces have typically addressed large tracts of land or park-like areas. Though most of these studies are limited to traditional parks, larger greenbelts and open spaces, several studies have assessed property values near and in the vicinity of surrounding

greenways. Most of these studies primarily concern proximity of properties near greenways and have shown a general pattern of increase in value. Greenways can, increase sales, value and marketability of nearby or adjacent properties.

Case Study: Seattle's Burke-Gilman Trail

The Burke-Gilman Trail is a converted 12.1 mile, 8 to 10 foot wide, rail-to-trail linear multi-purpose greenway. The original trail was constructed in 1978 and is currently being expanded. The trail traverses an industrial area, several neighborhood commercial areas, the University of Washington, six parks and residential areas. The major portion of the trail passes primarily through residential neighborhoods, with an average buffer of shrubs and trees extending 20 ft. from the trail to the edge of adjacent properties. There are 152 single-family homes and 607 condominiums immediately adjacent to the Burke-Gilman Trail. Approximately 302 single-family homes are located within one block of the trail. Residents, especially those with properties adjacent to the trail, were opposed to its constuction, claiming that crime in the area would increase, while the quality of life as well as property values would decrease. According to the study, the opposite was found to be true. Most residents adjacent to the trail feel positive about its impacts. The Burke-Gilman Trail helps sell homes, increase property values, and improve the general quality of life. In the real estate market, the trail is looked upon as an amenity. Location and proximity to the trail are advertised in publications on a regular basis. The trail was found to attract buyers and sell homes. Real estate agents found that homes near the trail, but not immediately adjacent to the it, sold for 6.5 percent more, as a result of their proximity. Homes immediately adjacent to the trail were found to be only slightly easier to sell. Agents were mixed in their views concerning the trail's influence in selling homes. Approximately 40 percent of the agents said that homes were easier to sell, 30 percent said they

were more difficult, and 27 percent saw no effect. Long-term residents who purchased homes earlier, were less likely to believe that the trail had any economic impact on their homes. Residents who purchased homes after the construction of the trail were more likely to believe the trail was a definite economic asset to their property values.

Case Study: Maryland's North Central Trail

In an economic and quantitative study done by PKF Consulting, the Northern Central Rail Trail has been found to improve the quality of life and property values of local residents. Results from a survey found that 95 percent of respondents viewed the trail as an asset to their community. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt that the trail added value to their properties. Residents also felt the trail increased the attractiveness of most properties within walking distance. In some locations along the trail, several businesses experience positive impacts. Development has been very limited along the trail and could account for a moderate level of exchange and economic growth. Although no specific influential pattern could be identified, the economic impact on property values was similar to the pattern found in Seattle, Washington. Homes not immediately adjacent to the trail, but within 1,000 feet of it, experienced the greatest increase in property values. Interestingly, properties directly adjacent to the trail experienced a decline in property values, which could account for 6.97 percent of the respondents viewing the trail as having a negative impact on property values. Real estate agents also use the trail to sell properties. Homes that are advertised as being located near the trail sell faster than homes that are not. One agent was quoted as saying, "...they wouldn't advertise the proximity of the Trail if it didn't sell property." (PKF Consulting, p. IV-48)

The Boulder Greenbelt

The Boulder Greenbelt system is a 17,000-acre system that has a tremendous impact on property values. The 1978 study showed that the largest value increases were for homes with views of the greenway, or immediate access to it. The average value of housing adjacent to the greenbelt was found to be 32 percent higher than those properties 3,200 feet away. Property value also declined at a distance from the greenway at an average rate of $4.20 per foot and up to $10.20 per foot. (Correll, Lillydahl and Singell, 1978) Additional tax revenues generated by increases in property values have also been noted. In just one neighborhood, the collective property values average to approximately $5.4 million greater than if the Boulder Greenbelt had never been constructed.

The initial purchase of the space for the greenway was $1.5 million. The additional $500,000.00 in property tax revenues generated annually would have covered the initial development cost in only three years. (Correll, Lillydahl and Singell, 1978)

Case Study: St. Paul's Swede Hollow Park

Swede Hollow Park, which is also on St. Paul's East Side, is a former residential and industrial area that was converted to park land beginning in 1973, when neighborhood residents and the St. Paul Garden Club collaborated with the city's Parks Department to create a city park. The park continues to be improved by a partnership of people, including Friends of Swede Hollow, the Parks Department, Department of Natural Resources, and Greening the Great River Park. The park is located in a secluded drainage ravine significantly below the grade of surrounding neighborhoods with four access points, and consists of natural areas; including

Phalen Creek, historical sites, and a recreational trail. The park's trail is part of the Phalen Creek Trail that runs through the Phalen Corridor, connects to Lake Phalen and will connect with the Willard Munger Trail that goes all the way to Duluth. Phalen Creek is a major feature of this park, especially because the creek is buried in a storm sewer pipe for most of its length.

Swede Hollow Park has had many positive impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods. Foremost is the accessibility to green space in the city for neighborhood residents as well as nearby downtown St. Paul and citywide residents. Awareness and use of the park has been continuously increasing, especially as a result of positive press coverage of the park. Swede Hollow also represents a source of pride and identity for the adjacent neighborhoods, as evidenced by the existence of the Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association (USHNA) and Friends of Swede Hollow. Residents initially had a negative perception of the Swede Hollow area as a dangerous open space. This perception significantly reversed with the increased use of the park, and responsive efforts by the police to prevent loitering issues, making the park feel safer. Swede Hollow provides opportunities for community building activities, including volunteer park cleanups, children's ecological education programs and community recreational activities.

According to Carol Carey of USHNA, the percentage of home ownership has increased in the areas adjacent to the park and the selling prices of nearby homes have also risen. The positive economic impacts cannot be solely attributed to the creation of neighborhood green space because historic preservation has also been an important aspect of the neighborhoods' revitalization. Although there is a thriving Swede Hollow Café next to the park and evidence of

increased business at nearby restaurants, opportunities for establishing additional related businesses, possibly recreational, are untapped as yet.

Citizen Participation & Options

To fully understand what decisions best serve the community, it is important to look at all the options for these underutilized spaces. Currently, the City of St. Paul's Land Use Plan has indicated these open spaces in the community as potential sites for housing development. The sites could certainly provide housing for many people, but what are the benefits and costs for the neighborhood, the East Side, the city and the metro area? Does it create a better environment, or a worse one? Socially, this is an ambivalent question as it could mean either. Environmentally, this could be very bad. These spaces are glacial till, mostly gravel and similarly unsuitable soil for development. The amount of fill dirt needed to level the ground and provide a stable enough base to build on is immense. How will this affect the natural environment of the community?

As noted earlier, some degree of change is inevitable because the storm sewer located directly below is in dire need of capacity relief, or upgrading. A lengthy process is involved with upgrading that could inconvenience residents with closed roads and unsightly construction; however something needs to be done. The creation of a wetland could be an option to consider because it provides enough capacity to relieve the storm sewer, and also adds park space to the community. In any case, the need for addressing the storm sewer situation provides an opportunity for the neighborhood to consider plans for these open areas.

The important thing to remember is that citizen participation in this decision-making process is crucial and should be recruited heavily. The residents need to understand that they could stay uninvolved, but too many things are happening in the area and it would in their best

interest to be involved. The likelihood of something happening in these spaces seems inevitable, so the community can seize the opportunity to have a significant say in what happens in the middle of their neighborhood.

Recommendations:

- Better connection of neighborhood to city's evolving greenway network, surrounding natural amenities, and other neighborhoods.
- Take advantage of available underused vacant green spaces to convert negatively or neutrally perceived spaces into neighborhood assets.
- Create and enhance the neighborhood's pride and identity by creating neighborhood amenities.
- Increase the potential for investment in this neighborhood, internal and external.
- Improve the neighborhood's quality of life by creating access to natural, recreational and educational resources.
- Create a unique community-building initiative focused on the design, creation and maintenance of a neighborhood greenway.

[i] Rivers and Trails conservation Assistance of the National Park Service, Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors - A Resource Book", page VII.
[ii] Ibid, page 1-4.
[iii] Cheryl R. Doss and Steven J. Taff, The Relationship of Property Values and Wetlands Proximity in Ramsey County, Minnesota, page 32.
[iv] Rivers and Trails conservation Assistance of the National Park Service, Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors - A Resource Book", page 6-3.

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